

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO TANAKA'S CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: TOKYO 14741

SUMMARY: TANAKA'S CABINET RESHUFFLE IS BEING MET WITH SEVERE CRITICISM BY THE MEDIA AND TANAKA'S POLITICAL FOES. TANAKA'S ACTION HAS BEEN BRANDED AS A MERE PLOY TO BUY TIME TO STAY IN POWER OR ARRANGE FOR HIS SUCCESSION. "ASAHI SHIMBUN", HITHERTO ONE OF TANAKA'S MILDDEST CRITICS, CAME OUT WITH AN EXCEPTIONALLY HARSH EDITORIAL CENSURING TANAKA ON NOVEMBER 13. END SUMMARY.

1. TANAKA'S NOVEMBER 11 CABINET RESHUFFLE CONTINUES TO MEET WITH SEVERE AND ALMOST UNIVERSAL CRITICISM IN THE MEDIA AND IN POLITICAL CIRCLES. LDP ANTI-LEADERSHIP ELEMENTS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, AND ALL MAJOR NEWSPAPERS ARE ATTACKING IT AS A PLOY TO AVOID FACING UP TO THE CHARGES OF FINANCIAL MISDEALING AND TO BUY TIME FOR DEVELOPING HIS DEFENSE AGAINST SUCH CHARGES

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OR AS A MEANS TO SET THE STAGE FOR PROLONGING HIS POWER,

EITHER THROUGH ANOTHER TANAKA CABINET OR ONE FRIENDLY TO HIM.

2. TANAKA'S SUPPORTERS, SUCH AS CABINET APPOINTEES TAKESHITA AND NAKASONE, HAVE NOT SPOKEN OUT SPECIFICALLY IN DEFENSE OF THE NEW CABINET. THEY HAVE, HOWEVER, ASKED FOR PATIENCE TO PERMIT TANAKA TO COLLATE MATERIAL FOR HIS DEFENSE AND TO PRESENT IT PUBLICLY AS HE PROMISED AT HIS NOVEMBER 11 PRESS CONFERENCE HE WOULD DO. NAKASONE IN PARTICULAR HAS ASKED THE LDP TO CLOSE RANKS SO THAT THE PARTY MAY OVERCOME THE CRISIS BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE PERSONAL AFFAIRS OF ITS CHIEF. OHIRA, ON THE OTHER HAND, MADE IT CLEAR THAT, WHILE HE SUPPORTED THE PRIME MINISTER, TANAKA'S FINANCIAL PROBLEMS WERE PERSONAL MATTERS WHICH HE SHOULD RESOLVE ON HIS OWN.

3. ANTI-TANAKA FORCES WITHIN THE LDP SAID THE CABINET RESHUFFLE WAS AN UNPRINCIPLED MOVE UNDERTAKEN BY TANAKA AGAINST THE ADVICE OF ANTI-MAINSTREAM FACTIONS. WHILE CRITICAL OF THE FACT THAT TANAKA MADE THE MOVE BEFORE THE FORD VISIT, FUKUDA AND OTHERS HAVE PUBLICLY SAID THEY WOULD NOT TAKE ACTION AGAINST TANAKA UNTIL THE DEPARTURE OF THE PRESIDENT. ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, YOUNG HAWKS WITHIN THE ANTI-MAINSTREAM FACTIONS ARE DISCUSSING POST-VISIT MOVES DESIGNED TO BRING ABOUT A SHOWDOWN WITH TANAKA. AMONG THE REPORTED MEASURES ARE: CALLING A SPECIAL CONFERENCE OF LDP DIETMEN TO BRING TANAKA TO ACCOUNT, JOINING OPPOSITION PARTIES IN A NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE, AND EVEN FORMING A NEW CONSERVATIVE PARTY. PRESS REPORTS ALSO PLAYED UP THE MOVES OF THE FOUR OPPOSITION PARTIES WHICH MET NOVEMBER 13 AND AGREED TO MOUNT A JOINT CAMPAIGN AGAINST TANAKA WITHIN THE DIET TO BRING ABOUT HIS RESIGNATION.

4. PRESS EDITORIALS HAVE, ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, TAKEN A HARSH ATTITUDE AGAINST THE CABINET RESHUFFLE. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE PRESS REACTION WAS THE NOVEMBER 13 EDITORIAL OF THE ASAHI SHIMBUN, HITHERTO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONE OF TANAKA'S MILDEST CRITICS. THE PAPER NOTED THAT JAPAN IS NOT EXCEPTIONAL IN TERMS OF THE PROBLEMS IT MUST OVERCOME, BUT ASKED: "DOES PRIME MINISTER TANAKA HAVE THE (REQUISITE) PERSUASIVE POWER AND TRUSTWORTHINESS?" THE PAPER SAID HE DOES NOT "AS LONG AS HE IS WRAPPED IN SUSPICION." NO HOPE IS TO BE GAINED FROM THE CABINET CHANGE, THE MORE SO BECAUSE IT REPRESENTS THE OLD PRACTICE OF HONORING "FACTIONAL PRIORITIES." IT MAY

BE TANAKA'S INTENTION, ASAHI SAID, TO HANG ON TO BRING ABOUT ANOTHER TANAKA GOVERNMENT THROUGH DIET DISSOLUTION AND GENERAL ELECTIONS. IF SO, THE PAPER SAYS, "THE NATIONAL LIVELIHOOD WILL BE RUINED."

5. EDITORIALS OF OTHER NEWSPAPERS WERE SIMILARLY CONDEMNATORY. MAINICHI SAID IT WAS "OUTRAGEOUS" TO CARRY OUT THE CABINET RESHUFFLE WHEN PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF IS DISTRUSTED AND UNDER SUSPICION. IT IS A MISTAKE, THE PAPER SAID, TO THINK THAT A CABINET RESHUFFLE WOULD HELP THE GOVERNMENT TO REGAIN THE PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE. YOMIURI SAID THE CABINET CHANGE WILL ONLY EMBITTER RELATIONS WITHIN THE LDP AND LEAD TO FURTHER "CONFUSION". THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD HAVE WIPED OUT PUBLIC SUSPICION BEFORE UNDERTAKING SUCH A PRECIPITOUS MOVE. SANKEI SHIMBUN AND NIHON KEIZAI EXPRESSED VIEWS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO THAT OF YOMIURI.
HODGSON

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